

**MINIMALISM IN ARCHITECTURE  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CONTEMPORARY  
URBAN DOMESTIC SPACES**

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**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Department of Architecture of the  
University of Moratuwa in partial fulfillment of the**

**requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Science**

**In**

**Architecture.**

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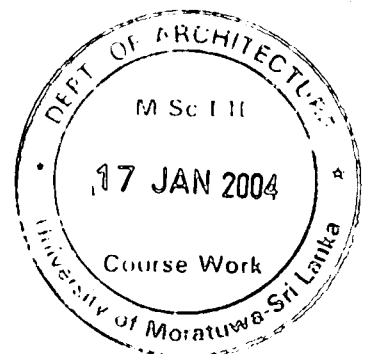
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by

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**January 2004**

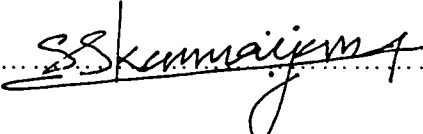
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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

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**CONTENTS**

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Declaration</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Illustrations</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>x</b>
 <b>INTRODUCTION</b>	 <b>01</b>
▪ The study	01
▪ Importance of the study	03
▪ Method of Study	04
▪ Scope and Limitation	04
 University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Electronic Theses & Dissertations <a href="http://www.lib.mrt.ac.lk">www.lib.mrt.ac.lk</a>	
<b>1.0 CHAPTER ONE: Minimalism as Reflected in the Process of Human Habitation</b>	 <b>05</b>
<b>1.1 Minimalism in Nature &amp; Art</b>	<b>06</b>
1.1.1 Minimalism in Nature	06
1.1.2 Minimalism in Art and Sculpture	07
1.1.3 Minimalism in Dance	10
1.1.4 Minimalism in Land Art	11
1.1.5 Minimalism in Architecture	12
<b>1.2 Eastern Approaches to Minimalism in Architecture</b>	<b>14</b>
1.2.1 Zen Buddhism and Architecture as a source of inspiration to Modern Minimalist Architecture	 15
1.2.2 Traditional Sri Lankan House and Minimalist Architecture	19
<b>1.3 Western Approach - Modern Movement and Minimalism</b>	<b>21</b>

<b>2.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER TWO: Minimalism In Contemporary Domestic Architecture</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Architecture - Definition and Purpose</b>	<b>24</b>
2.1.1	Architectural Space	25
2.1.2	Spatial Quality	25
2.1.3	Form & its Relationship with Space & Spatial Quality	25
2.1.4	Contemporary Domestic Space in the Context of Urbanization	26
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Characteristics to Achieve Spatial Quality of Minimalist Architecture</b>	<b>27</b>
2.2.1	Simplicity	29
2.2.2	Clarity	30
2.2.3	Tranquility	32
2.2.4	Elementary Geometry / Form	33
2.2.4.1	Two Dimension Form	33
2.2.4.2	Three Dimension Form	36
(a)	Monolithic Form to achieve Minimalism	36
(b)	Unity & Architectural Composition to achieve Minimalism	38
(c)	Balanced Composition to achieve Minimalism	39
(d)	Scale and Proportion to achieve Minimalism	41
(e)	Rhythm & Repetition to achieve Minimalism	42
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Enhancement of Spatial Quality in the Minimalist Space</b>	<b>45</b>
2.3.1	Use of materials & Textures	45
2.3.2	Use of colour & light.	48
2.3.2.1	Colour & Perception	48
2.3.2.2	Minimalism and Colour: Expressive Simplicity	48
2.3.2.3	Minimalism and Light: Expressive Simplicity	52
2.3.3	Element details	54

<b>3.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER THREE: The Sri Lankan Minimalist Domestic Space; Case Studies in Contemporary Urban Situations</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Case Study One:</b> Lakmali Nanayakkara House; Arch. Varuna de Silva and Pradeep Kodikara	<b>57</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Case Study Two:</b> Ratwatte House; Arch. Ranjith Alahakoon	<b>63</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Case Study Three:</b> Nalin Indrasena House; Arch. Shyamika Silva	<b>69</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Case Study Four:</b> Chandaka Jayasundere House; Arch. Varuna de Silva	<b>76</b>
	 University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Electronic Theses & Dissertations <a href="http://www.lib.mrt.ac.lk">www.lib.mrt.ac.lk</a>	
	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>82</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>86</b>



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- [Fig.01] Aesthetic experience of the moon and the sea at night.
- [Fig.02] Lightning
- [Fig.03] A minimal art.
- [Fig.04] Copper enamel & aluminum, Donald Judd, 1972
- [Fig.05] Donald Judd, 1970.Brass & fluorescent Plexiglass.
- [Fig.06] Dan flevin, 1964.Ultraviolet fluorescent light
- [Fig.07] Five abstract towers-Mexico city.
- [Fig.08] Minimal dance
- [Fig.09] Spiral Jetty, Robert Smithson, 1970.
- [Fig.10] Unity in pure form
- [Fig.11] Campo Baeza House; Clear purity of form.
- [Fig.12] Buddhist priest.
- [Fig.13] Typical Japanese tea house, Shugakuin detached palace.
- [Fig.14] Rock garden in Tofuku-ji, Kyoto.
- [Fig.15] Cave monastery, Sittulpawwa.
- [Fig.16] Traditional Sinhalese houses - minor tradition.
- [Fig.17] Sinhalese vernacular domestic building - courtyard type.
- [Fig.18] Minimal House at Molido - Portugal, Archt. Jhon Powson.
- [Fig.19] House on a Red Cliff in Mirissa, Archt. Geoffrey Bawa.
- [Fig.20] Lakmali Nanayakkara house; Archt. Varuna de Silva.
- [Fig.21] Ratwatte house, Archt. Ranjith Alahakoon.
- [Fig.22] House of Louis Barragon.
- [Fig.23] Church of Water, Acht. Tadao Ando.
- [Fig.24] Court Yard of the Neuendorf House, Jhon Pawson.
- [Fig.25] Minimalist approach in the bath room.
- [Fig.26] Chapel of Notre Dame du Hout at Ronchamp.
- [Fig.27] Elementary Geometry of the form, Hauei Residence, Japan.
- [Fig.28] Complicated Geometry of the form, Cachawal House, Thiland.
- [Fig.29] Elementary Geometry of the plan form, O'Reilly house, Sydney.
- [Fig.30] Plan of Cachawal House, Thiland.
- [Fig.31] Plan form – walls less house.
- [Fig.32] Minimal Interior of Walls Less House.

- [Fig.33] Spiral minarets of Iraq.
- [Fig.34] Louvre pyramid, Paris.
- [Fig.35] Hakuei Residence, Japan.
- [Fig.36] Composition of simple geometric forms, Luis Barragan.
- [Fig.37] White courtyard and colourful cubic forms, Luis Barragan.
- [Fig.38] Balanced distribution of elements about an axis.
- [Fig.39] Balanced distribution of elements to achieve minimalism.
- [Fig.40] Scale is a dialogue between man and object.
- [Fig.41] Minimal quality of the scale, Helmut Lang, New York
- [Fig.42] Rhythmic repetition and sense of order.
- [Fig.43] Repetition of simple, massive monolithic forms, Stonehenge.
- [Fig.44] Repetition of colours and shapes, Jigsaw store, London.
- [Fig.45] Repetition of forms, shapes and materials, Book Center, France.
- [Fig.46] The use of monolithic materials to achieve minimalism, Tadavo Ando.
- [Fig.47] Large pieces of table top marbles, Jhon Pawson's house
- [Fig.48] Timber planks cut to the width of a tree, Jhon Pawson's house
- [Fig.49] Use of mat finishes and rough textures
- [Fig.50] The distribution of colours and dynamic composition.
- [Fig.51] Colour and pure form
- [Fig.53] Full white spaces.
- [Fig.54] White walls, floor and furniture
- [Fig.55] Distribution of black and white, Teng Residence, Singapore
- [Fig.56] Distribution of Colours to define planes
- [Fig.57] Natural light penetrates in to the interior.
- [Fig.58] Church of the light, Tranquility of the minimalist space.
- [Fig.59] Use of innovative lighting design to avoid the monotony or boredom.
- [Fig.60] Simple gutter details.
- [Fig.61] Sculptural quality of elements.
- [Fig.62] The sculptural staircase, Casa Gilardi by Luis Barragán.
- [Fig.63] Ground floor plan of Nalin Indrasena House.
- [Fig.64] First floor plan of Nalin Indrasena House.
- [Fig.65] Monolithic form of the white cube.
- [Fig.66] Dark entrance corridor.
- [Fig.67] Contrast of forms.





- [Fig.68] Double height living & dining space.
- [Fig.69] Rear garden, the main focus of the house.
- [Fig.70] Balanced composition of colours and elements.
- [Fig.71] Ground Floor.
- [Fig.72] 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Terrace.
- [Fig.73] Emptiness of the Central court yard.
- [Fig.74] Main light well-simplicity of form.
- [Fig.75] Spatial composition to achieve balance & unity.
- [Fig.76] Simplicity of the bathroom.
- [Fig.77] Use of artificial lighting to enhance the austerity and severity.
- [Fig.78] Ladder to the water tank.
- [Fig.79] Main stair case.
- [Fig.80] Ladder to book store.
- [Fig.81] A timber door
- [Fig.82] The Terrace.
- [Fig.83] Elementary geometry & monolithic quality of the 3D form.
- [Fig.84] Manipulation of pure geometric forms to achieve unity.
- [Fig.85] Pure white & blue shades harmonize the building with the sky.
- [Fig.86] Protruding shaded balcony as an extended space, of the bedroom.
- [Fig.87] Light well.
- [Fig.88] Simplicity and clarity of space.
- [Fig.89] Chromatic harmony.
- [Fig.90] Blue light well.
- [Fig.91] Grey cement floor.
- [Fig.92] Minimalism of elements
- [Fig.93] Simple form of the window.
- [Fig.94] Entrance door as an element gives an excitement to the elevation.
- [Fig.95] A simple bench
- [Fig.96] Façade to the road.
- [Fig.97] Plans of Chandaka Jayasundere House
- [Fig.98] Huge open free volume creates sense of wholeness.
- [Fig.99] The wall painted in orange.
- [Fig.100] White interior.
- [Fig.101] Open rise steel and timber staircase.

## ABSTRACT

Architecture as an essential art, which expose throughout the man's life, it should provide man with the desired physical and psychological comfort. Therefore it is important to facilitate meaningful Architecture to eliminate inappropriate ornamentation & disquietingly ornate Architecture, which ignore the spaciousness & meaning.

Within above framework, this dissertation is an attempt to crystallize some thoughts about minimal Architecture, which can be seen as the pursuit of simplicity, as well as an ideal design approach which caters for essentialities out of different design approaches. Contribution of form as well as colours, light, materials, textures and elements, to achieve spatial quality in the minimalist space, is discussed in detail.

Special emphasis will be paid to contemporary domestic buildings in urban context. Thus the home should be a place of tranquility by banishing disorder, ostentation and vanity to feel it as the master of habitable space.

## INTRODUCTION

### ▪ The Study

The simple definition of Architecture is the **“art and practice of designing and constructing buildings.** This includes the style on which it is design and constructed.” (Oxford dictionary, 10<sup>th</sup> edition).

A profound connotation of this word according to Kulatilake (1994:1)

**“Architecture is a physical, emotional and intellectual experience. It facilitates man’s bodily comfort; emotionally attaches him into it, and, as a work of art, through symbolic communication, leads him towards a higher realm of contemplation”**

To facilitate such architecture, minimalism has been widely discussed from different design approaches. This dissertation is an attempt to crystallize some thoughts about minimalism in architecture, which can be seen as the pursuit of simplicity. Special emphasis will be paid to contemporary domestic buildings in urban context. Further minimalism has been discussed in art, dance, sculpture, landscape but not in detail, only because this led to minimalism in contemporary architecture.

The minimum could be defined as “The perfection that an Artifact achieves, when it is no longer possible to improve it by subtraction.” (Pawson, J. 1992:7)

“Minimalism is considered as an attitude where with less consumption of elements, to achieve more.” (Pawson, J. 1992:7)

This is the quality that an object has, when every component, every detail and every junction has been reduced or condensed to the essentials. It is the result of the omission of nonessentials and inappropriate ornamentation. The greatest architecture is simple in appearance (like for instance, the architecture of Louis Barragan, Tadao Ando, Jhon Pawson et al ) had a great deal of thought and detail behind it.

The desire for minimalism has a long history. It ranges from Zen Buddhism and it also applied in traditional Sri Lankan lifestyle, as a way of life free from the dead weight of an excess of possessions which can be considered as the eastern approach to minimalism.

Minimal living has always offered a sense of liberation, a chance to be in touch with the essence of existence, rather than be distracted by its trivial. Such architecture has been an inspiration to many Western architects.

Minimalism has been related much to the development of functionalism. The simplicity in minimalism cannot be equated to the sparseness of modernism, with the machine age aesthetic, stripped of ornament, so that form and detail are reduced to the mere blandness. Minimalism is an older, richer and broader tradition than that.

Minimalism can be seen as the reduction of architecture to its most basic concept of space and mass. **Its central theme is not elimination of ornament but celebration of space and form.** Therefore simplicity, clarity, tranquility, elementary geometry, are some of the expedients the designer can use in creating artifacts or spaces, that have the minimal quality.

Therefore, colour, texture, materials, light and shadow also play a major role to enhance the spatial quality of the minimalist space.



## ▪ Importance of the Study

Architecture is a dilemma in Sri Lanka as on many occasions it has not been successful in serving the qualitative needs required of it against the challenges of the modern era. When considering the contemporary situation, except for a few artifacts, most others do not cater to **the deeper meaning in architecture.**

As a result inappropriate ornamentation, disquietingly ornate architecture, can be seen everywhere that ignores the spaciousness, meaning and qualitative aspects of it. Minimalism as a design approach which facilitates meaningful architecture by providing calmness and simple wonderful spaces may be the best way to get rid of today's feverish and hectic environments. Further, it is appropriate, as it is a functional tool rather than a formal philosophy. This dissertation considers the importance of applying minimalism in the urban context. It is not an important task to create minimalism in the rural context, since it often contains large land plots, abundant lush greenery, views and scenery which contribute to the desired simple lifestyles we seek to achieve in the urban context. The challenge is to create calm contemplative, soothing and sensual domestic spaces in the hectic urban environments.

As “**A home is the common factor of being a retreat, a place of solitude**” (Powell R. 1993:3) it is appropriate to consider urban **houses.**

Therefore the importance of this study is to encourage minimal architecture and investigate the appropriateness of this approach to contemporary urban houses.

## ▪ Method of Study

A Case study approach has been adopted as the methodology of the study. In the first phase, a very brief description of the study, to convey the idea of minimalism shall be made.

The second chapter is a detailed study on contemporary minimal architecture with special consideration to characteristics, concepts and theories used to achieve spatial quality. Before starting on the topic of contemporary minimal architecture, some definitions and purpose of architecture will be discussed to clarify the frame - work of chapter two.

Finally selected case studies, to establish the theories and concepts of chapter two, will be described. Further these practical applications to justify the appropriateness of minimal architecture in the contemporary urban context will be discussed.



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## ▪ Scope & Limitations

Minimalism is a large subject area which can be applied to life, nature and all kinds of arts, architecture and beyond that. This dissertation pays particular attention to **minimal architecture**.

Further, it concentrates on **contemporary domestic** buildings in the **urban context**. Since **spatial quality** would be considered here, contribution of **form** will be discussed in detail. Also the dissertation focuses attention on, the use of colour, texture, and light, materials & element details to enhance the spatial quality of the minimalist space.

Minimalism responds to environment, placement, and relationship to site. It is an interesting characteristic which can be applied to large land plots with views and vistas in rural context (eg. House designed by Archt. Jeoffry Bawa on a cliff at Mirrissa). Since tight urban plots are discussed, the previously mentioned character (minimal way of synchronize the building in the context) will not be discussed, in detail.